AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1-38.   (Canceled)

39.   (Currently Amended) A method for providing communication among a client system, a server system and an electronic communications network, the client system including a Central Processor Unit (CPU), volatile working memory associated with the CPU, and a communications interface, the client system further running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running server software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the electronic communications network, the method comprising:

if a previous session using said client software completed unsuccessfully:

offering a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client system;

receiving from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

determining whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said indication;

specifying a billing preference, said billing preference chosen from a predefined set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

transmitting said billing preference to the server system;

receiving a billing approve/reject signal from the server system; ~~and~~

accessing the electronic communications network via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said receiving; and

conducting two-way communications with ~~between~~ the electronic communications network ~~and the client system~~ via the server system ~~if an approve signal is provided in said receiving~~.

40.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the client software is missing one or more components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network and the method further includes the following performed prior to said specifying:

   receiving said one or more missing components from the server system; and

   installing said one or more missing components.

41.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the client software is missing one or more components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network and the method further includes the following performed prior to said specifying:

   searching the client system for install files containing any of said one or more missing
      components;

   installing any missing components found in said searching;

   receiving any additional missing components from the server system; and

   installing said additional missing components.

42.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein the client software has one or more outdated components and the method further includes the following performed prior to said specifying:

   receiving a current version corresponding to each of said outdated components from the
      server system; and

   installing said current version corresponding to each of said outdated components.

43.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, further including the following performed prior to said specifying if the client system has proper network configuration and registry settings to accomplish communication with the electronic communications network:

   storing said settings in the volatile working memory;

   requesting assignment of an IP address from the server system; and

   receiving said IP address from the server system.

44.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, further including periodically sending a periodic connect signal to the server system to determine a connection status of the client system.

45.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39, wherein said billing approve/reject signal is a temporary approval signal.

46.   (Currently Amended) A method for providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the electronic communications network, the method comprising:

    initiating communication with said client system upon said client system completing initialization wherein if a previous session using said client software completed unsuccessfully, said client system:

        offers a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client system;

        receives from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

        determines whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said indication;

    providing a set of billing options to the client system, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

    receiving a billing preference from the client system, said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

    transmitting a billing approve/reject signal to the client system; ~~and~~

    <u>providing the client system with access to the electronic communications network via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting; and</u>

    conducting two-way communication between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system ~~if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting~~.

47.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 46, further comprising assigning an IP address to the client system prior to said providing <u>a set of billing options</u>.

48.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 46, wherein the client system has client software and the method further comprises the following performed prior to said providing a set of billing options:

      determining if the client software on the client system is missing any components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network;

      receiving information from the client system as to whether install files exist for said missing components in the client system; and

      providing to the client system any additional missing components that do not have install files on the client system.

49.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 46, wherein the client system has client software and the method further comprises the following performed prior to said providing a set of billing options:

      determining if the client software on the client system has any outdated components; and

      providing to the client system a current version corresponding to each of said outdated components.

50.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 46, further including performing the following prior to said providing a set of billing options if the client system has proper network configuration and registry settings to accomplish communication with the electronic communications network:

      receiving a request for assignment of an IP address from the client system;

      assigning an IP address to the client system; and

      forwarding said IP address to the client system.

51.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein a plurality of client systems are in communication with the server system and the method further comprises:

      maintaining a database tracking identifying information for each of said client systems in communication with the server system; and

for each of said plurality of client systems, recording in said database billing information for

each respective client system and data representing an amount of monetary charges

accumulated by each of said respective client systems.

52.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 51, wherein said data representing said

amount of monetary charges includes data representing connect time.

53.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 51, further comprising:

recording data representing a total amount of monetary charges for each respective client

system following disconnection of the client system;

transmitting said total amount of monetary charges to a network management system; and

processing account billing corresponding to the total amount of monetary charges in the

network management system.

54.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 46, further comprising:

receiving a periodic connect signal from the client system to determine a connection status

of confirming that the client system is still connected;

providing a clock signal;

determining if said periodic connect signal is received from the client system within a

predetermined period based on said clock signal; and

setting a disconnect parameter if it is determined that said periodic connect signal has not

been received from the client system within said predetermined period.

55.   (Currently Amended) A method for providing communication among a client system, a

server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client

software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic

communications network, the server system running software for managing communications

between a plurality of client systems and the electronic communications network, the method

comprising:

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initiating communication with said client system upon said client system completing

initialization wherein if a previous session using said client software completed

unsuccessfully, said client system:

offers a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client

system;

receives from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

determines whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said

indication;

providing a set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for

making a monetary payment;

receiving a billing preference from the client system , said billing preference chosen from

said billing options;

sending an approval inquiry to a remote approval system;

sending a temporary approval signal from the server system to the client system before an

approval signal is received by the server system from the remote approval system <u>and</u>

<u>granting the client system temporary access to the electronic communications network</u>

<u>via the server system</u>; and

conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and

the client system via the server system.

56. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 55, further comprising:

receiving a rejection signal from the remote approval system;

transmitting a rejection signal from the server system to the client system; and

discontinuing two-way communications with the client system.

57. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 55, further comprising:

sending a rejection signal to the client system; and

receiving additional billing information from the client system.

58. (Currently Amended) A client system for communicating with an electronic

communication network via a server system, the client system comprising:

a central processing unit (CPU);

volatile working memory associated with said CPU;

a communications interface coupled to said CPU and volatile working memory; and

client software coupled to said CPU, volatile working memory, and communications

interface, said client <u>system being</u> ~~software~~ configured <u>to</u> ~~for~~:

if a previous session using said client software completed unsuccessfully:

<u>offer</u> ~~offering~~ a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said

client system;

<u>receive</u> ~~receiving~~ from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

determining whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said

indication;

<u>specify</u> ~~specifying~~ a billing preference, said billing preference chosen from a predefined

set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making

a monetary payment;

<u>transmit</u> ~~transmitting~~ said billing preference to the server system;

<u>receive</u> ~~receiving~~ a billing approve/reject signal from the server system; ~~and~~

<u>accessing the electronic communications network via the server system if an approve</u>

<u>signal is provided in said receiving; and</u>

<u>conduct</u> ~~conducting~~ two-way communications <u>with</u> ~~between~~ the electronic

communications network ~~and the client system~~ via the server system ~~if an approve~~

~~signal is provided in said receiving~~.

59.   (Currently Amended) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client software is

missing one or more components necessary for communications with the electronic

communications network and the client <u>system</u> ~~software~~ is further configured to ~~perform the~~

~~following prior to said specifying~~:

<u>receive</u> ~~receiving~~ said one or more missing components from the server system; and

<u>install</u> ~~installing~~ said one or more missing components<u>,</u>

<u>before the client system specifies a billing preference</u>.

60.   (Currently Amended) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client software is missing one or more components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network and the client system ~~software~~ is further configured to ~~perform the following prior to said specifying~~:

>   search ~~searching~~ the client system for install files containing any of said one or more missing components;

>   install ~~installing~~ any missing components found in said searching;

>   receive ~~receiving~~ any additional missing components from the server system; and

>   install ~~installing~~ said additional missing components,

before the client system specifies a billing preference.

61.   (Currently Amended) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client software has one or more outdated components and the client system ~~software~~ is further configured to ~~perform the following prior to said specifying~~:

>   receive ~~receiving~~ a current version corresponding to each of said outdated components from the server system; and

>   install ~~installing~~ said current version corresponding to each of said outdated components,

before the client system specifies a billing preference.

62.   (Currently Amended) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client system ~~software~~ is further configured to:

>   store said settings in the volatile working memory;

>   request assignment of an IP address from the server system; and

>   receive said IP address from the server system,

~~perform the following~~ before the client system specifies a billing preference ~~prior to said specifying~~ if the client system has proper network configuration and registry settings to accomplish communication with the electronic communications network. ~~network:~~

>   ~~storing said settings in the volatile working memory;~~

>   ~~requesting assignment of an IP address from the server system; and~~

>   ~~receiving said IP address from the server system.~~

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63. (Currently Amended) The client system of claim 58, wherein the client system ~~software~~ is further configured to ~~for~~ periodically send ~~sending~~ a periodic connect signal to the server system to determine a connection status of the client system.

64. (Previously Presented) The client system of claim 58, wherein said billing approve/reject signal is a temporary approval signal.

65. (Currently Amended) A server system for facilitating communications between a client system and an electronic communication network, said server system comprising:

a processor; and

software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system, said server system configured to ~~software configured for~~:

initiate ~~initiating~~ communication with said client system upon said client system completing initialization wherein if a previous session using said client software completed unsuccessfully, said client system:

offers a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client system;

receives from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

determines whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said indication;

provide ~~providing~~ a set of billing options to the client system, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

receive ~~receiving~~ a billing preference from the client system, said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

transmit ~~transmitting~~ a billing approve/reject signal to the client system; and

grant the client system access to the electronic communications network if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting; and

interface ~~conducting~~ two-way communication between the electronic communications network and the client system ~~via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting~~.

66.   (Currently Amended) The server system of claim 65, wherein said <u>server system</u> ~~software~~ is further configured <u>to assign</u> ~~for assigning~~ an IP address to the client system <u>before</u> <u>providing a set of billing options</u> ~~prior to said providing~~.

67.   (Currently Amended) The server system of claim 65, wherein the client system has client software and ~~said software on~~ the server system is further configured to ~~perform the following~~ ~~prior to said providing~~:

>   <u>determine</u> ~~determining~~ if the client software on the client system is missing any components necessary for communications with the electronic communications network;

>   <u>receive</u> ~~receiving~~ information from the client system as to whether install files exist for said missing components in the client system; and

>   <u>provide</u> ~~providing~~ to the client system any additional missing components that do not have install files on the client system<u>,</u>

<u>before said server system provides a set of billing options</u>.

68.   (Currently Amended) The server system of claim 65, wherein the client system has client software and said ~~software on said~~ server system is further configured to ~~perform the following~~ ~~prior to said providing~~:

>   <u>determine</u> ~~determining~~ if the client software on the client system has any outdated components; and

>   <u>provide</u> ~~providing~~ to the client system a current version corresponding to each of said outdated components<u>,</u>

<u>before said server system provides a set of billing options</u>.

69.   (Currently Amended) The server system of claim 65, wherein said <u>server system</u> ~~software~~ is further configured <u>to:</u> ~~to perform~~

>   <u>receive a request for assignment of an IP address from the client system;</u>

>   <u>assign an IP address to the client system; and</u>

>   <u>forward said IP address to the client system,</u>

before said server system provides a set of billing options ~~the following prior to said providing~~ if the client system has proper network configuration and registry settings to accomplish communication with the electronic communications network. ~~network:~~

> ~~receiving a request for assignment of an IP address from the client system;~~
> ~~assigning an IP address to the client system; and~~
> ~~forwarding said IP address to the client system.~~

70.   (Currently Amended) The server system of claim 65, wherein a plurality of client systems are in communication with the server system and said <u>server system</u> ~~software~~ is further configured <u>to</u> ~~for~~:

> <u>maintain</u> ~~maintaining~~ a database tracking identifying information for each of said client systems in communication with the server system; and
> for each of said plurality of client systems, <u>record</u> ~~recording~~ in said database billing information for each respective client system and data representing an amount of monetary charges accumulated by each of said respective client systems.

71.   (Previously Presented) The server system of claim 70, wherein said data representing said amount of monetary charges includes data representing connect time.

72.   (Currently Amended) The server system of claim 70, wherein said <u>server system</u> ~~software~~ is further configured <u>to</u> ~~for~~:

> <u>record</u> ~~recording~~ data representing a total amount of monetary charges for each respective client system following disconnection of the client system;
> <u>transmit</u> ~~transmitting~~ said total amount of monetary charges to a network management system; and
> <u>process</u> ~~processing~~ account billing corresponding to the total amount of monetary charges in the network management system.

73.   (Currently Amended) The server system of claim 65, wherein said <u>server system</u> ~~software~~ is further configured <u>to</u> ~~for~~:

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receive ~~receiving~~ a periodic connect signal from the client system confirming that the client system is still connected;

provide ~~providing~~ a clock signal;

determine ~~determining~~ if said periodic connect signal is received from the client system within a predetermined period based on said clock signal; and

set ~~setting~~ a disconnect parameter if it is determined that said periodic connect signal has not been received from the client system within said predetermined period.

74.   (Currently Amended) A server system for facilitating communications between a client system and an electronic communication network, said server system comprising:

a processor; and

software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system, said server system ~~software~~ configured to ~~for~~:

initiate ~~initiating~~ communication with said client system upon said client system completing initialization wherein if a previous session using said client software completed unsuccessfully, said client system:

offers a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client system;

receives from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

determines whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said indication;

provide ~~providing~~ a set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

receive ~~receiving~~ a billing preference from the client system , said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

send ~~sending~~ an approval inquiry to a remote approval system;

send ~~sending~~ a temporary approval signal ~~from the server system~~ to the client system before an approval signal is received ~~by the server system~~ from the remote approval system and provide the client system with temporary access to the electronic communications network; and

conduct ~~conducting~~ two-way communications between the electronic communications

network and the client system ~~via the server system~~.

75.   (Currently Amended) The server system of claim 74, wherein said <u>server system</u>

~~software~~ is further configured <u>to</u> ~~for~~:

    <u>receive</u> ~~receiving~~ a rejection signal from the remote approval system;

    <u>transmit</u> ~~transmitting~~ a rejection signal from the server system to the client system; and

    <u>discontinue</u> ~~discontinuing~~ two-way communications with the client system.

76.   (Currently Amended) The server system of claim 74, wherein said <u>server system</u>

~~software~~ is further configured <u>to</u> ~~for~~:

    <u>send</u> ~~sending~~ a rejection signal to the client system; and

    <u>receive</u> ~~receiving~~ additional billing information from the client system.

77.   (Currently Amended) A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly

embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for

providing communication among a client system, server system, and an electronic

communications network, the client system including a Central Processor Unit (CPU), volatile

working memory associated with the CPU, and a communications interface, the client system

further running client software for managing the communications between the client system and

the electronic communications network, the server system running server software for managing

communications between a plurality of client systems and the electronic communications

network, the method comprising:

    if a previous session using said client software completed unsuccessfully:

        offering a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client

            system;

        receiving from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

        determining whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said

            indication;

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specifying a billing preference, said billing preference chosen from a predefined set of

billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a

monetary payment;

transmitting said billing preference to the server system;

receiving a billing approve/reject signal from the server system; ~~and~~

<u>accessing the electronic communications network via the server system if an approve signal</u>

<u>is provided in said receiving; and</u>

conducting two-way communications <u>with</u> ~~between~~ the electronic communications network

~~and the client system~~ via the server system ~~if an approve signal is provided in said~~

~~receiving~~.

78.   (Currently Amended) A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly

embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for

providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic

communications network, the client system running client software for managing the

communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the

server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client

systems and the server system through an electronic communications network, the method

comprising:

initiating communication with said client system upon said client system completing

initialization wherein if a previous session using said client software completed

unsuccessfully, said client system:

offers a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client

system;

receives from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

determines whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said

indication;

providing a set of billing options to the client system, said billing options including at least

one technique for making a monetary payment;

receiving a billing preference from the client system, said billing preference chosen from

said billing options;

transmitting a billing approve/reject signal to the client system; ~~and~~

providing the client system with access to the electronic communications network via the

server system if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting; and

conducting two-way communication between the electronic communications network and

the client system via the server system ~~if an approve signal is provided in said~~

~~transmitting~~.

79.   (Currently Amended) A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly

embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for

providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic

communications network, the client system running client software for managing the

communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the

server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client

systems and the server system through an electronic communications network, the method

comprising:

initiating communication with said client system upon said client system completing

initialization wherein if a previous session using said client software completed

unsuccessfully, said client system:

offers a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client

system;

receives from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

determines whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said

indication;

providing a set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for

making a monetary payment;

receiving a billing preference from the client system , said billing preference chosen from

said billing options;

sending an approval inquiry to a remote approval system;

sending a temporary approval signal from the server system to the client system before an

approval signal is received by the server system from the remote approval system and

<u>granting the client system temporary access to the electronic communications network</u>

<u>via the server system</u>; and

conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and

the client system via the server system.

80.   (Currently Amended) An apparatus for providing communication among a client system,

server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system including a Central

Processor Unit (CPU), volatile working memory associated with the CPU, and a communications

interface, the client system further running client software for managing the communications

between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running

server software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the

electronic communications network, the apparatus comprising:

means for, if a previous session using said client software completed unsuccessfully:

offering a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client

system;

receiving from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

determining whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said

indication;

means for specifying a billing preference, said billing preference chosen from a predefined

set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a

monetary payment;

means for transmitting said billing preference to the server system;

means for receiving a billing approve/reject signal from the server system; ~~and~~

<u>means for accessing the electronic communications network via the server system if an</u>

<u>approve signal is provided in said receiving; and</u>

means for conducting two-way communications <u>with</u> ~~between~~ the electronic

communications network ~~and the client system~~ via the server system ~~if an approve~~

~~signal is provided in said receiving~~.

81.   (Currently Amended) An apparatus for providing communication among a client system,

a server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client

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software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system through an electronic communications network, the apparatus comprising:

> means for initiating communication with said client system upon said client system
>> completing initialization wherein if a previous session using said client software
>> completed unsuccessfully, said client system:
>>> offers a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client
>>>> system;
>>> receives from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and
>>> determines whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said
>>>> indication;
> means for providing a set of billing options to the client system, said billing options
>> including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;
> means for receiving a billing preference from the client system, said billing preference
>> chosen from said billing options;
> means for transmitting a billing approve/reject signal to the client system; ~~and~~
> <u>means for providing the client system with access to the electronic communications network</u>
>> <u>via the server system if an approve signal is provided in said transmitting; and</u>
> means for conducting two-way communication between the electronic communications
>> network and the client system via the server system ~~if an approve signal is provided in~~
>> ~~said transmitting~~.

82.   (Currently Amended) An apparatus for providing communication among a client system, a server system, and an electronic communications network, the client system running client software for managing the communications between the client system and the electronic communications network, the server system running software for managing communications between a plurality of client systems and the server system through an electronic communications network, the apparatus comprising:

means for initiating communication with said client system upon said client system completing initialization wherein if a previous session using said client software completed unsuccessfully, said client system:

offers a user an option of either continuing or restoring system settings of said client system;

receives from said user an indication responsive to said offering; and

determines whether to restore said system settings based at least in part on said indication;

means for providing a set of billing options, said billing options including at least one technique for making a monetary payment;

means for receiving a billing preference from the client system , said billing preference chosen from said billing options;

means for sending an approval inquiry to a remote approval system;

means for sending a temporary approval signal from the server system to the client system before an approval signal is received by the server system from the remote approval system <u>and granting the client system temporary access to the electronic communications network via the server system</u>; and

means for conducting two-way communications between the electronic communications network and the client system via the server system.